

Introduction to Subbasin Assessments, TMDLs, and WAGs

What is a Subbasin Assessment?

A ‘Subbasin assessment’ is a document that describes the watershed(s) condition for which a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) is proposed. It provides data and information addressing the water quality condition of individual waterbodies in the watershed, water quality concerns, the status and attainability of designated uses specific to each waterbody, and the water quality criteria pertinent to support the designated uses. The most common beneficial uses in north Idaho are cold water aquatic life and primary contact recreation (swimming). A subbasin assessment also identifies the nature and location of pollutant sources, past and ongoing pollutant control activities, and other information pertinent to the analysis of water quality and the development and implementation of a TMDL (*modified from Idaho Code 39-3602*).

What is a TMDL?

A ‘Total Maximum Daily Load’ (TMDL) is a water quality plan for a waterbody not fully supporting designated beneficial uses. Simply put, a TMDL is a pollutant budget. A TMDL is a calculation of the maximum amount of a pollutant that a waterbody can receive from human-caused sources and still meet water quality standards. This budget is expressed in terms of loads: the amounts of pollutants added to a waterbody during a given time or per a volume of water. For example, a load allocation to a waterbody might be 5 kilograms of phosphorus per day from a given source. A TMDL budget takes into account loads from point, nonpoint, and natural background sources. For more information, see *Idaho Code 39-3602*.

Duties of a Watershed Advisory Group (WAG)

Watershed Advisory Groups are voluntary participants in the TMDL development process. Members are appointed by the Director of DEQ at the advice of regional Basin Advisory Groups. Its general duties are outlined in *Section 39-3616 of Idaho Code*:

“The Director, upon the advice of the appropriate Basin Advisory Group, shall name Watershed Advisory Groups which will generally advise the department on the appropriateness, attainability and status of existing and designated beneficial uses and water quality criteria within the watershed, and on the development and implementation of TMDLs and other state water quality plans, including those specific actions needed to control point and nonpoint sources of pollution within the watersheds of those waterbodies where designated beneficial uses are not fully supported.”

WAG members are encouraged to:

- Attend WAG meetings regularly.
- Bring their own perspectives and knowledge regarding the watershed to the table.
- Be open to dialogue regarding all interests and be committed to maintaining and improving the water quality.
- After approval of the Subbasin Assessment and TMDL, WAG members participate in the development of TMDL Implementation Plans.

DEQ will:

- Work collaboratively with the Watershed Advisory Group to produce the Subbasin Assessment, TMDL and Implementation Plans for the watershed.
- Consult with Watershed Advisory Groups while developing the Subbasin Assessment and TMDL and present all available requested information in a timely fashion.
- Produce a Subbasin Assessment and TMDL in accordance with state and federal water quality laws.